

CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF CONSERVATION: *The National Wildlife Refuge System*

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On March 14, 2003, the National Wildlife Refuge System will be 100 years old. Over the next three months leading up to the Celebration, a monthly column will appear on these pages with facts and figures about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System. Following the five-part series, a quiz will be published about the Refuge System whose answers will have been provided in the monthly columns. On March 14, 2003, at the Holiday Inn, Detroit Lakes, we will host a public celebration commemorating 100 years of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Completed quizzes that are brought to the March 14 celebration will be put in a bin and a drawing conducted. The first quiz drawn that has all of the correct answers will receive a very special prize. Watch these pages for each month's article and save them on the refrigerator to assist you come quiz time! This is the third article of the five part series and features Hamden Slough NWR.

HAMDEN SLOUGH NWR — Its for the Birds! *(third in a five-part series)*

John James Audubon, America's best known ornithologist, would be pleased with the birds and habitat that are returning to the area north of Audubon, Minnesota. In 1871, Audubon's niece viewed the Hamden Lake area with the then Governor of Minnesota. They were so impressed with the abundance and diversity of birds and wildlife that they decided to name a nearby township for her famous uncle. In the century that followed, western Minnesota's landscape and wildlife changed dramatically with agricultural development. Local residents, noting the dwindling numbers of wildlife around drained Hamden Lake, asked state and federal agencies to evaluate the wildlife area for protection in the 1940's. Multiple reviews were conducted over the next several decades by both the state of Minnesota and the U.S. Department of Interior. In 1989, the U.S. Congress elected to re-establish the historic Hamden Lake area. Today, the south end of Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge lies in Audubon Township and extends north through dry Hamden Lake.

Hamden Slough Refuge acquired its first tract of land in 1990, and completed the first wetland and upland restorations in 1991. During the next 10 years, 235 wetlands were restored, including Bisson Lake near Callaway and Homstad Lake near Audubon. In addition, over 1000 acres of uplands were restored with native grasses. The grasses provide cover for nesting birds and provides a source of fall seeds, which are rich in carbohydrates, allowing birds to "lay on winter fat." Wildflowers have also been seeded in the uplands to attract a diversity of insects. The insects provide a concentrated source of spring protein for returning female birds, hungry after their migration. This protein is vital to the females, providing energy for nesting and raising young chicks and ducklings.

Restoration efforts are beginning to return the Hamden Slough area to its former level of wildlife diversity and abundance. The increasing bird population has been noted by local and state birding organizations. During May and June each year, many bird watchers tour the refuge and are delighted to find “life list” birds—birds they had never seen. Since just 1998, the refuge staff and area birders have sighted nine new bird species on the refuge and discovered 13 previously unrecorded nesting species. This includes four bird species never before recorded as nesting in Becker County—American avocet, Brewer’s blackbird, ruddy duck, and redhead. Local bird watchers and the refuge staff are also heartened with the explosive growth in total numbers of birds on the refuge. Prior to 1998, only two Hudsonian godwits had been previously recorded on the refuge, and for only a few days. Since that time, hundreds of Hudsonian godwits, and many other migratory shorebirds, have been observed on the refuge and now remain through much of May and June.

The restoration of Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge is half done and has been completed by a staff of three. This is a very small number of personnel to have for a refuge building effort, but the staff is enthusiastic about the challenge. The Hamden Slough staff has been able to extend their limited equipment and time by finding partnership funding and working with local contractors. Ducks Unlimited has been a major partner for refuge development. In addition, personnel and assistance from both the Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District Office and Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge have been critical.

For more information on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Refuge System Centennial, or the your National Wildlife Refuge System please visit our website at <http://www.fws.gov>.